

The Walsh Boats

By Allen Walsh (2005)

Dad was always fascinated by the sea and boats.

After Gray's 'Elegy', his favourite poem would have been Masefield's 'Sea Fever'. He even suggested at one time that I join the Naval Cadets at the age of about 14. I get seasick. I can swim 20 yards. I think water is good only for drinking.

When we kids were very young Dad started to make two model yachts, each of a reasonable size, but they were never finished, probably because he was thinking of something bigger.

THE DINGHY

When I was about 6, probably 1934, Dad built a small flat-bottomed dinghy, 6 feet long, on our kitchen table. The boat was made from thin plywood (not waterproof ply in those days) and was propelled by a paddle of the type used for canoes.

Dad was working at the Herald Office and his two-week holidays were allotted according to a roster system, so they might occur at any time of the year.

For several years we would stay for the length of the holiday at Miss Moody's at Black Rock. This was in a house in Beach Road behind a small shop only a few doors south of Balcombe Road. Dad never owned a car, and I don't know how he got the boat from West Brunswick to Black Rock, but we have a photograph of Grandpa Matthews sitting in the boat on the water at Black Rock.

One night, just after dark, Dad got us out of bed to see a spectacular fire to the north about three-quarters of a mile away from where we were standing, at the beach end of Balcombe Road. There was a great orange glow in the sky and we could see flames leaping above a large building. Later we were told it was the two-storey Red Bluff Hotel on Beach Road at Sandringham. It was totally destroyed, but there was no loss of life. The hotel was rebuilt and was a landmark of the next seventy years. Only a few months ago (2005) this building, which was unused in recent times, was also destroyed, in a suspicious fire.

THE CATAMARAN

Only a couple of years later, Dad was building a catamaran – in the Lounge Room this time.

The term 'catamaran' was not known except to people who had seen the natives using them in the islands to the north of Australia. We always had to explain the meaning of the word to our friends. Dad's catamaran had two floats 9 feet long, each fitted with a metal rudder. The floats were bolted to two cross-beams one of which had a seating for the mast which in turn was fitted with a white 'duck' sail which had been sewn together by Mum. The two linked rudders had been made by his new stepfather, Alf Cron.

The usual problem of transporting a boat arose. Dad solved it by asking his big easy-going cousin, Alec Gillon, to take it on his car. Alec had a 1920's canvas-top car with a dicky-seat at the back and running boards on both sides.

The catamaran was taken apart and one float tied on to each side of the car one fine Sunday morning. The mast, sail and other fittings must have been tied on top. Brian and I were in the dicky-seat and Dad inside with Alec.

We were traveling down the centre section of St Kilda Road, with very little traffic about, when Alec was waved over by a motor bike policeman. The policeman told Alec that he should be in the side lane (for cars) instead of the centre (for commercial vehicles). Alec explained that because he had the boat on board he had deliberately used the centre section so that he would not obstruct traffic in the side lane. This seemed sensible, but the policeman still told him to drive in the side lane.

At this time we were staying in half a house owned by a retired couple called Burton in Arkaringa Crescent, a short distance back from Beach Road. This was nearer to our favourite beach, Half Moon Bay. The Burtons owned a big brown Airedale dog with stiff curly hair. Mr. Burton was a keen gardener and had a fenced vegetable garden in the back half of his backyard. He had made two tall self-closing gates in his garden fences by taking a cord from the outer top corner of the gate, across the gateway and through a pulley on the top of the opposite post. The cord was attached to a counter weight running up and down beside the post. The gates worked well.

Mr. Burton and Dad often hired a rowboat and went fishing in the early morning for flathead and snapper. The catamaran sailed very successfully and we went out with Dad several times to the 'Cerberus', the old iron warship which had been the flagship of the Victorian Navy in the 19th century. The ship had been sunk in 1929 off Half Moon Bay to form a breakwater. We sometimes fished for leatherjackets in the translucent light-green water inside the Cerberus.

We couldn't take the catamaran away from the beach at night so Dad had an arrangement with a fisherman called Pearce to leave it in his large boathouse.

On windy days at the beach the family was protected by another of Dad's brainwaves – a screen about 4 feet high made of Hessian tied with tape to four tall wooden stakes. Our favourite spot on the sand was not far from Half Moon Bay Lifesaving Pavilion and I remember seeing a beautiful new lifeboat there. It was finished in a light-coloured varnish and blue paint and sign-written in small lettering on the stern were the words 'A GIFT FROM SIDNEY MYER'.

We kids sometimes leant on the sill of an open window of the lifesaving club and watched the activities of the members. One day they had a gramophone playing a catchy song which I had never heard before. It was called 'When You Wear a Little White Gardenia', and it was played over and over. While I was never a music 'fan', time and again over the years I would hear a new song and remember where I first came across it.

THE OUTBOARD MOTORBOAT

Dad was soon planning his next boat – a real boat fitted with an outboard motor, a fairly new invention at the time. There wasn't room inside the house for this one, so it was built on the front verandah, blocking access to the front door for several months. The boat was 13 feet long, about 4-1/2 ft wide, and the front half contained a concealed tapering galvanized iron airtight tank with the intention of making the boat unsinkable.

The stern was a NZ Kauri, the sides and bottom of 18 inch wide Yellow Pine and the decking above the tank Hoop Pine. The floor and seats were narrow Jarrah battens left in the natural red colour.

The airtight tank was made up on our kitchen table by Alf Cron who was a coppersmith with the Victorian Railways. Alf had worked on building the engine for the 'Spirit of Progress' – the streamlined steam train put into service on the Albury line the previous year.

Nancy still owns a miniature kettle made by Alf from two copper coins. The base is a halfpenny and the dome-shaped body was formed from a penny. Janet and I have two 'crib' boards made by him for scoring in the once-popular card game.

The various sections of the tank were riveted together, then soldered. As an extra precaution Dad had arranged with Grandpa Matthews to get a quantity of bitumen from the Wood Pipe works in Footscray. Grandpa had worked there for many years. The large lumps of bitumen were melted in a saucepan on Mum's stove and then painted thickly over all the joints.

Before the sheets of galvanized iron were put together, Alf had swung his right hand quickly past the edge of one sheet. The slightly burred edge cut deeply into his third finger about half an inch from the end. The nearly-severed piece was hanging from the finger and blood was spilling everywhere. A doctor was called, several stitches put in, and eventually the finger recovered, but it never looked the same.

Brian and I went with Dad to the City to buy the outboard motor from Milledges, the motor bike people in Elizabeth Street. The unit was a 'Johnson', American made, about 4 hp. It was small by current standards, but quite satisfactory for Dad's purpose. After he had decided to buy it, Dad explained that he knew nothing about motors and asked to be told everything he needed to know. They explained everything – except one thing, which turned out to be vital.

Dad decided to launch the boat in the Maribyrnong River upstream from Footscray and arranged for Roy Sporton (Nancy's father-in-law many years later) to take it there in his furniture removal van. The boat was quite heavy, so Dad enlisted our big neighbour Alf Sayers (always known as 'Sairsy') to come with us.

Once afloat, Dad, Sairsy, Brian and I piled in and Dad clamped the motor to the stern, filled the tank with petrol from a two gallon can, made the necessary arrangements for starting in 'choke' position and pulled the starting cord. The engine roared into life long enough to get away from the bank, then stopped. Dad wrapped the cord around the top of the motor again and pulled. It wouldn't start. This procedure was repeated hundreds of times over the next four hours while we regularly drifted down with the current then paddled back to where we started, all to no avail.

That would have been one of the most disappointing days in Dad's life. Apart from a bit of colourful language, he showed great restraint.

Roy Sporton must have been asked to come back later in the day to take us back home. If Roy had stayed around, he or anyone familiar with petrol engines would have told Dad that 'choke' was only used for starting, and that by leaving the lever in that position the carburettor was quickly flooded and then there was no hope of getting the thing to start.

Dad must have returned to Milledges and found the answer to his problem. After that the motor always worked well.

It was necessary to find a permanent place to moor the boat because it could not be transported back and forth from home. The problem was solved when Dad arranged with one of the chaps operating ferries on the Yarra to use a mooring under Princes Bridge. The river at that point is 100 years wide and the bridge has three equal spans of heavy steel arches supported on huge bluestone piers.

On the east side of the bridge at the City end, just above the water level there is a long wharf called Princes Walk approached by several flights of bluestone steps from Batman Avenue. This wharf has for over a century been the starting point for the large and small ferries plying the river. The ferry operators have their offices and maritime shops in vaulted bluestone structures built into the cliff below Batman Avenue and opening onto the wharf. Dad apparently arranged for the boat to be permanently moored to a heavy iron ring built into the first bluestone bridge pier out in the water, where it could only be approached by boat. We would get to it by paddling across in a small dinghy owned by one of the ferry proprietors and we were able to leave the outboard motor and our other boating equipment in his building. This would have been in 1938.

In fine weather at weekends the family would set out from home often walking to Sydney Road, about 1-1/2 miles, to catch a tram which took us closer to Princes Bridge than our local West Brunswick tram.

While I loved the trips in the boat, I disliked the traveling from and to home. We walked along Albion Street which was quite narrow for a main road.

The whole family of six (including Geoff who was quite young) would be squeezed onto a footpath which only allowed two abreast when dodging past power poles. I was about ten and would slouch along, head down, thoroughly bored, until Dad called out like a drill sergeant "Stand up straight Bill! Pull your shoulders back!" Dad always called me Bill. His advice has stuck with me and I still try to stand up straight when walking in the street.

Usually we would go upstream on the Yarra because of the beautiful surroundings. Dad somehow knew a lot about Melbourne and the suburbs although we never had street directories or local maps at home before the war. He knew the suburbs we were going through and could name all the bridges up to Dights Falls.

The river winds back on itself many times and the furthest we ever went was to the old timber Johnston Street bridge in Collingwood, just short of the falls. I will try to describe some features of the trip up the river.

On leaving Princes Bridge there were, on the right, half a dozen large timber boatsheds, some 2-storied, belonging to various rowing clubs. At the water's edge there were extensive timber decked ramps for launching their boats. On the left was Batman Avenue close to the river and playing fields where the Tennis Centre was built in recent years. The river swung to the right and we entered a long straight stretch which was used for the Henley Regatta and the Head of the River boat races for decades before World War 2.

These events attracted enormous crowds lining both banks of the river. The banks were gently sloped and covered with well-kept green lawns. On the south side was a long wharf at the water's edge for officialdom, neatly paved with orange gravel.

After the war the Swan Street bridge was built at an angle across this stretch in the early 1950's. It took more than 5 years to build because of the post-war shortage of materials – particularly cement. Henley-on-Yarra was then discontinued and the Head of the River was transferred to the Barwon River at Geelong. Further along on the right you could see the tall white tower of Government House and the start of miles of wonderful weeping willow trees on the water's edge. The willows and the elms on Alexandra Avenue hid the Botanic Gardens from view. It was Ferdinand von Mueller the early director of these gardens who originally planted willows along the river.

We then approached the triple-arched Morell Bridge at Anderson Street. This was designed and built in about 1898 by a young engineer named John Monash, using reinforced concrete for the first time in Australia. The course of the river was temporarily altered to allow the bridge to be built on dry land, then the earth below its arches was excavated. Later Monash became a somewhat reluctant Australian General in WW1 and is credited with master-minding the last great push by combined Allied forces on the western front which broke the German defences and led to the end of the war. Monash was knighted by King George V in France in July, 1918. After the war he was given the job of founding the Victorian State Electricity Commission in the Latrobe Valley.

The next bridge was at Punt Road and after that the steel lattice railway bridge on the South Yarra line. This railway bridge was replaced in the late 1950's with a plain plate girder bridge designed by the architect Best Overend.

A short distance further on was the all-concrete Church Street Bridge which connected to Chapel Street. This bridge was painted white and had a great number of plain rectangular columns with the spaces between topped by small semi-circular arches. The castle-like battlemented Melbourne Boys' High School stood on a hill just to the south-west overlooking its own oval. The river continued generally in an easterly direction with South Yarra houses and flats on the south side and factories and small houses on the Richmond side.

Around a slight bend we came to an island – later named Herring Island. The island was formed accidentally about a century ago. The river went around a sudden loop which pointed towards the south. Quarry holes had been dug in the solid land at the northern portion of the loop. During one of the many Yarra River floods in the 19th century the river cut its way through the quarries in a straight line and that has been part of the river ever since.

Immediately to the south of Herring Island is the Como Park sports oval which is deeply cut into a steep slope on what was once part of the grounds of 'Como'. The great house 'Como' was left to the National Trust by the Armytage family in 1959. The Como Park oval in its amphitheatre setting, always immaculately kept, must be the most beautiful arena in Melbourne. On the south side of the river on the next bend, Wesley College later had its boatsheds. It was here that Ainsley did her stint of school rowing – but not in the Head of the River.

Just after another loop in the river we would come to the MacRobertson Bridge at Grange Road where South Yarra finished and Toorak started. The bridge was paid for by one of Melbourne's wealthiest men, MacPherson Robertson, the confectionery millionaire who started out as a boy making chocolate in a nail can in his mother's kitchen.

When our father decided in the early 1950's to resign from his long-time job as a proof reader at the Herald Office, he had the idea of producing and editing staff magazines for large Melbourne companies. It was necessary to find businesses employing more than 500 people and eventually Dad

persuaded Swallow and Ariell of Port Melbourne and MacRobertsons of Fitzroy to accept his proposals. The magazines would be printed monthly and contain general articles of interest plus news and photographs of people involved in the business.

Dad worked from home and was responsible for everything from selecting and editing the articles to engaging photographers and organizing printing firms. He also wrote additional material. The name of MacRobertsons' magazines was 'The Nail Can'. A year or two later Dad arranged to start a similar magazine for Carlton & United Breweries, one which he produced for many years and was called 'What's Brewing?'

After the bridge at Grange Road the big Toorak houses and properties started. Many of the houses would have faced onto St Georges Road and their large gardens extended down to the river. Several had their own private jetties and some had motor launches permanently moored there. The weeping willows were thick along this stretch and except in winter the trees would present a green curtain of fine branches hanging right down to the water.

Here and there in hot weather, particularly on the Richmond side, we would see small groups of teenage kids playing in the water wherever there was a patch of grey sand. Often there would be ropes fixed to overhanging tree limbs or bridge framing so they could swing out over the water like Tarzan and the land with a splash.

It always seemed strange to me that poor people in Richmond who were near the river enjoyed a much better view of houses and gardens across the water than the landed gentry of Toorak who looked across to the industrial suburbs.

Still heading east we would pass under the steel framed railway bridge just north of Heyington station then we left Toorak behind to approach Scotch College, in Hawthorn. While the main Scotch buildings were well away from the river, the timber framed boatsheds for the rowers were of course, at the edge of the water. Two very sharp left hand bends at this point turned us back in the direction of the city.

The Yarra Boulevard and Burnley Horticultural Gardens were on our left and to our right a long reserve extended as far as the Riversdale Road Bridge. Just before the bridge, on our right, there was a timber jetty and steps leading up to the site of the celebrated Hawthorn Tea Gardens.

The Tea Gardens had been a favourite stopping-off point for ferry passengers for three generations and had only recently closed down. In the 1960's the 'Leonda' restaurant and reception centre was built at this spot. After the bridge there was another stretch of fine private gardens at the rear of houses facing Yarra Grove, Hawthorn. While the sites on the whole were smaller than those in Toorak, there were more private jetties and even some boatsheds behind these houses.

Next on the right came a wonderful property which we knew nothing about until Janet and I were appointed in 1977 as architects for Strathcona Baptist Girls' Grammar School at Canterbury. In the early 1970s the school bought this large property on the Yarra as a second 'campus' for use by Year 9 students to give them a break from the main school. There was a National Trust classified elaborate Elizabethan Mansion called 'Tay Creggan' built here by an architect called Purchas in the 1890's. It had been extended by others (and later by us) and was a wonderful asset to Strathcona. When we sent our Lindy to Strathcona in about 1980, she did her Year 9 at Tay Creggan.

Just around the next bend to the right was the Hawthorn Railway Bridge, a beautiful structure opened in 1861. Apparently it should have been opened five years earlier and would have been Victoria's oldest rail bridge, but all the ironwork, prepared in England went to the bottom of Bass Strait when the famous fast sailing ship Schomberg sank near Warrnambool in 1855. The bridge has heavy bluestone abutments on each side of the river, pierced with wide archways, one of which spans the Boulevard. Originally the main span across the water was carried on lattice girders, but this span was spoiled somewhat in later years by concrete beams put in to cater for heavier locomotives.

At this point the river turned to the north and went under the Hawthorn Bridge at Bridge Road and the Victoria Bridge at Barkers Road.

Here we left Richmond and Hawthorn behind and travelled between Abbotsford on the left and Kew. Although the two east-west roads through Collingwood (Victoria Street and Johnston Street) are only three-quarters of a mile apart, the distance along the river around two great lops at Yarra bend is more than three times as far. The old timber bridge at Johnston Street which was quite high because of the steep hill on the Kew side was in very poor condition. There was public pressure for decades to have it replaced but this was not done until the 1960's.

It would take several hours for us to get as far as the Johnston Street bridge because of the distance and restriction on speed. All boats including ferries were limited to a maximum speed of (I think) 4 miles per hour. This was to protect the banks from erosion caused by the wash which fanned out both sides of all forms of motor boat.

Dad knew that the rules of the water were the opposite of our rules of the road – we had to keep to the right (starboard). We three older kids would occasionally be allowed to take the handle or tiller of the outboard motor and steer for a few minutes under Dad's watchful eye. This was not hard to do provided a large paddle-boat ferry did not pass in the opposite direction. Although the ferries had to keep to the speed limit, they displaced so much water in their wake that the waves produced could rock small boats and even throw them off course.

We would usually find a picnic spot somewhere and Mum had the necessary food and drink in her basket. There were occasional jetties and steps leading to public paths or parkland. On very hot days we could pull into the cool green cave-like shelter of the willow trees.

One day in summer we were coming back late in the afternoon and Dad was hailed by two policemen on a small jetty in Richmond near the railway bridge. They explained that a young fellow had disappeared while swimming shortly before. They had 'dragging' equipment with them to try to find the body but needed a boat to use it. Would Dad lend our boat and his time to help them drag the river?

It was quite a shock to the family but of course Dad said 'Yes' and the police offered to drive Mum and we four kids home. The police car was new and was probably part of the 'Flying Squad' operated by the Victoria Police at the time. We travelled through East Melbourne on roads I did not know, but I remember going past St. Patrick's Cathedral on the west side.

Most of the cathedral had been built in dark Footscray basalt (bluestone) in the 1860's and 1870's but the three sandstone spires were not constructed until 1936-39. The spires were nearly finished when we saw them, so it must have been early 1939.

Dad arrived home quite a bit later. He said the police had him driving the boat back and forth until it became too dark to see properly. They thanked him and said they would resume the search in the morning using another boat. We later heard that the body was found, but we were grateful it was not while our boat was being used!

Occasionally we would go down-river and then go up the Maribyrnong as far as the Flemington Racecourse. There were a great variety of ships and smaller boats to be seen, but not many trees until we got near the racecourse. The three central city bridges (Princes Bridge, the railway bridge to Port Melbourne and St Kilda, and Queens Bridge) were all built in the 1880's by the father of our minister, David Munro. The father, also David Munro, owned the largest heavy engineering business in Melbourne and was also involved in railway and cable tramway construction. He lost everything when the banks crashed at the end of the 'Land Boom' in 1893. The only other city bridge before World War 2, at Spencer Street, was not built until 1929.

It must have been in 1940 that Dad decided to base the boat at Half Moon Bay, our favourite little beach between Sandringham and Black Rock. He took Nancy with him because she was a good swimmer and they travelled out through the mouth of the river and around the bay past all the intervening beaches – Port Melbourne, South Melbourne, Middle Park, St. Kilda, Elwood, Brighton and Sandringham.

At Half Moon Bay the boat was moored to a small buoy close to the pier and protected by the pier from the prevailing south-west winds. The back half of the boat continued to be protected from rain by our waterproof canvas cover folding over the edges and attached in a similar way to waterproof tonneau covers over the rear of 'Utility' vehicles. The outboard motor and other items of equipment were left in the same large fisherman's boatshed that had housed the catamaran a few years earlier.

By this time we were taking our holidays in another house directly above Half Moon Bay in Beach Road. This was a nice double-fronted brick house finished in grey rough-cast stucco, with a wide archway across the front verandah. It was owned by Mr Apted, a retired Methodist minister.

Our tenancy of half a house owned by the Burtons in Arkaringa Crescent had ended in what might be described as 'acrimonious circumstances'. The Sayers family lived next door to us on the south side in Wales Street and Alf "call me Sairs" and his wife Lil were good friends of our family. They had three children, Paddy (a girl), Mick and Peggy, all close to Geoff's age.

One day when we were at Arkaringa Crescent, Alf and Lil were invited down to spend the day at the beach and the evening at the house. As I mentioned earlier, Alf was a big easy-going bloke (about 6 feet tall and fourteen stone). He had been brought up in a Catholic orphanage and worked as a barman for his brother-in-law, a chap named Duggan who had the Town Hall Hotel in North Melbourne.

The day had gone off very well, but late in the evening, after we kids had gone to bed, Alf and Dad were apparently partying on. Mr Burton, who had gone to bed earlier, suddenly appeared at the door and objected to the revelry. Dad, who was always quick to take offence, took this as a slight on his guest and in spite of the fact that we had holidayed with the Burtons very happily for about three years, he refused to go there again.

Soon after this, Dad arrived home with a shiny black motor car steering wheel, although we had never owned a car! His brain was in overdrive again and he planned to alter the boat so that he could pilot it from mid-point, in the way that speedboats often are.

He took the boat home and altered the rear half so that two full-width seats faced the front, similar to a motor car. The steering wheel shaft came out of the curved timber 'dashboard' and partly-concealed sash cords extended down both sides through a system of pulleys and were attached to the outboard. This mechanical system controlled only the steering. Dad had to start the motor at the back, then quickly scramble forward to the front seat to take control of our direction. But it worked.

I think that the alterations came about for functional reasons. Dad was the heaviest member of the family and when he was seated at the back, beside the outboard, the bow would rise out of the water, even at relatively slow speeds. Nancy remembers being told to take a towel off her head on a particularly sunny day on the Yarra because it was obscuring Dad's view.

In about 1941, after Dad had joined the Air Force, he was based at first in St Kilda Road and then at Reid's Building in Chapel Street, Prahran. He became friendly with two 'Air Crew' members of the RAAF, originally from Sydney, but temporarily stationed in Melbourne. Dad invited them home occasionally and also to join us on visits to Half Moon Bay. They were homely types and seemed to like mixing in with our family.

Neil was of average size, a little overweight and would have been in his early 30s. He was an 'air gunner', a crew member of bomber aircraft. Most air gunners did not live long. Neville was about 25, over 6 feet tall, well-built, with dark hair and looked like a Hollywood leading man. He was a bomber pilot. Dad said he had played interstate rugby for NSW. One day the three of them were standing at the bar of a hotel (nobody sat down to drink in those days) and Dad had taken his watch off to wind it. As he was putting it back on his wrist, it slipped and fell. According to Dad, Neville swooped and caught it before it hit the hard tiled floor. Dad marveled that anyone could move so fast!

Unfortunately, even those lightning reflexes could not help him in war. Within a year Neville died when his bomber was shot down. As far as we know, Neil survived the war.

I must digress and tell the story of 'Coxy'.

Mr Cox (I don't think I ever knew his first name) lived in Bayles Street, only about three doors along from the end of Wales Street. I can't remember him having children. He was several years younger than Dad.

Dad had joined up when the war situation was looking serious. He was about 38 and among the oldest recruits accepted for the RAAF. After Dad had been in uniform for a few months, Coxy pumped him for information on how to get into the RAAF as an officer. Coxy must have worked in an office in the city and for years they had travelled in on the same tram. Coxy had been an ear-basher long before the term was invented at the start of the war. While Dad could keep up with anyone in general discussion, he objected to discussing private matters in public, so he had to suffer Coxy's opinions given non-stop on the tram in a loud voice.

Dad told us that he doubted whether Coxy would qualify to get into an Officers Training Course (I think the Leaving Certificate was required), so he was very surprised a few weeks later to hear that Coxy was accepted. From then on, Dad not only had to listen to Coxy's voice, but he was required to salute the 'Officer' every time they met!

Dad used to go over the day's happenings every night at the dinner table, so we had a fair idea of what he thought of Coxy. He summed it all up one day in a sentence which George Bernard Shaw might have been proud of – "I suppose he's not a bad sort of poor ignorant bugger!"

Back to the boat.

There had been a terrible storm one night and Dad must have been contacted at work by the Half Moon Bay fisherman. The boat had been torn from its moorings and washed up on the beach. Dad rushed down as soon as he could get away. While it was not a total wreck, there was so much damage that Dad could not face the job of rebuilding it. He gave the boat to the fisherman who had been such a help to him over many years.

In a matter of months Dad had been posted 'up north' and he spent the next couple of years in Darwin area, according to him outdistancing all the younger men in the sprint to the trenches when the air raid sirens blew.